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Operation Nickel Grass

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Background

Just as the United States was ending its massive involvement in Vietnam and reducing its force structure, the Military Airlift Command (MAC) was called upon to conduct a major wartime airlift in support of Israel . At approximately 2 p.m. on the afternoon of 6 October 1973, (the day of Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement), Egypt and Syria simultaneously attacked Israel in violation of the tenuous cease-fire that had existed between the three countries since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. Desperately engaged in a war on two fronts, Israel quickly pressed all of its El Al Airline commercial aircraft into service to ferry replacement war materials from the United States; however, these airlift resources were inadequate to transport the large amount of supplies needed, especially the outsized cargo. Intensifying the crisis, the Soviet Union began airlifting supplies to Egypt and Syria on 10 October.

The Airlift

In response to an urgent request from Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, President Richard M. Nixon initiated an aerial resupply operation to Israel starting on 13 October. Nicknamed NICKEL GRASS, the airlift soon proved the value of maintaining a responsive and efficient military airlift system. For the next 32 days, MAC C-141 and C-5 cargo transports streamed steadily into Lod International Airport at Tel Aviv from onload points throughout the United States carrying urgently needed war materials. The aerial resupply was conducted with an en route stop at Lajes Field in the Azores, approximately one half of the one-way distance of 6,450 nautical miles from the United States to Israel. Given the diplomatic sensitivities associated with so much of the world's dependence on Arab oil, the C-141 and the C-5 flight routes over the Mediterranean carefully avoided the airspace of all the nations in the region.

The first mission was completed when a C-5 landed at Lod Airport on 14 October with 186,200 pounds of cargo. To expedite the unloading operations of all the MAC aircraft arriving in Israel, another C-5 had been dispatched to Lod with material handling equipment and aerial port personnel. Unfortunately, it was forced to abort at Lajes for maintenance. As a result, the cargo aboard the first C-5 was unloaded manually by Israeli civilians and MAC crew members. The command's airlift planners scheduled the flights into Lod at the rate of four C-5 and 12 C-141 missions daily. The airlift flow peaked on 21 October with the arrival of six C-5s and 12 C-141s. Nine days later, 30 October, the intensity slackened as sealift began to take over the bulk of the resupply operation.

From the arrival of the first mission on 14 October through the landing of the last aircraft at Lod on 14 November, MAC's combined force of C-5s and C-141s airlifted 22,318 tons of material to Israel. The delivery was completed in 567 missions and 18,414 hours of flying time. In 145 missions, the C-5s carried half of the tonnage, and the C-141s moved 10,754 tons on 422 missions.

By the time the cease-fire was in place on 2 November, MAC's Israeli operation had outperformed the Soviet effort in resupplying Egypt and Syria. The Soviet Air Force used AN-12 and AN-22 transport aircraft to haul 15,000 tons on 935 missions. What made MAC's performance all the more noteworthy was that C-5s and C-141s had covered a one-way distance of 6,450 nautical miles compared with an average distance of 1,700 nautical miles flown by the Soviet transports.

Contributing so significantly to the success of Operation NICKEL GRASS was the C-5 which carried an average of 73 tons to the C-141's 28 tons. Additionally, the C-5 transported outsized cargo including 155mm howitzers, 175mm cannons, M-60 and M-48 battle tanks, Sikorsky CH-53D helicopters, and McDonnell Douglas A-4 Skyhawk aircraft fuselages. No other USAF aircraft had that capability. NICKEL GRASS further constituted the first real test of the C-5 under wartime conditions.

While the Israeli Airlift confirmed the importance of the United States maintaining basing facilities at Lajes, it also renewed interest in developing the C-5's aerial refueling capability. Had the Portuguese not made Lajes available and with Germany, Spain, Greece, and Turkey refusing aircraft landing rights, MAC would have been hard pressed to execute Operation NICKEL GRASS.

An account by Lt. Col. Harry Heist, USAF (Ret)

On 6 October, as Israel was being attacked by Egyptian and Syrian forces, our C-5 crew was onloading materials at Patuxent Naval Air Station, Maryland, for a trip that would take us across the Pacific Ocean to Anderson AFB on the island of Guam. The Paris Peace Accords had ended the United States' direct military intervention in Vietnam, with the cease-fire agreement going into effect on 27 January 1973. However, the United States continued to provide assistance to counter North Vietnam's incursions into Cambodia, Laos, and South Vietnam. Anderson AFB's location and its mission were critical in providing this assistance.

Our return trip took us via Hickam AFB, Hawaii, arriving back at Dover on 14 October only to be met by the squadron's operations officer informing us to wash our flying suits, hug the wife and stand by for a trip to Israel. In less than 36 hours I was on the ramp at Wright Patterson AFB, Ohio, onloading cargo for Tel Aviv. During the period of 17 days I would fly four missions in support of Operation NICKEL GRASS ended only by maxing out my allowable flying time.

As with most new things, there were some problems with the C-5's sophisticated navigational systems. Although the C-5 had inertial navigation (very high tech at the time) and doppler, both were sometimes prone to failure and considered simply as just other aids to navigation. The C-5 did have a full complement of navigation gear — sextant, loran, radar, etc. However, due to the constraints placed upon the aircrews (restricting the fly over of the airspace of the Mediterranean border countries), navigation from Lajes through the Mediterranean and into Israel at times became a bit hairy. I recall that on one mission we had minimum navigational aids. It was dark, and we were approaching the Straits of Gibraltar. There is a ten mile gap between Gibraltar and the coast of Morocco, and we were required to fly between the two with just five miles on each side of the center line. Normally the radar would get us through there okay, but this time we had lost our radar and our other electronic navigational aids were unreliable at this location. With the aircraft's speed clocked in excess of Mach .78 (530 mph) and our altitude 5½ miles above the water, the coasts were approaching rapidly with no time to fix our position by celestial observation. I had the pilot look out of his window and the co-pilot out of his and I was sitting in the jump seat between the two of them as we flew down the center line visually sighting the ground lights on both coasts. Aided by radio fixes and with the help of the U.S. Navy's 6th Fleet, we approached the Eastern Mediterranean where we picked up our Israeli F-4 Phantom escort for a safe approach and landing at Lod Airport.

Regardless of the time of arrival at Lod, every aircraft was welcomed by very attractive El Al Airline flight attendants who had prepared a brunch for the crew. Also, on every departure, each crew member received a flight lunch, sometimes more than one, usually with steak and plenty of fresh fruit. Souvenirs were also given to the crews and one that I received is in the museum's NICKEL GRASS exhibit.

My last trip into Lod was on 4 November and, following two weeks at home, I was again back in Southeast Asia at U-Tapao , Thailand.

Sources: MAC History Office, Anything, Anywhere, Anytime: An Illustrated History of the Military Airlift Command, 1941-1991 ; Heist, Harry, memoirs

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Josef
7 months ago

Your contribution has NEVER been forgotten by the thousands of Israelis your heroic efforts saved. My father was an artillery NCO reservist in the Israeli army. As war broke out he snd four others were sent from Tel Aviv in a comandeered civilian car to drive 12 hours to the Suez Canal to help hold the front against the massive Egyptian assault. My father asked what about some guns? The five were given ONE Uzi submachine-gun. 'What are we supposed to do?' my father asked. 'Use your initiative, get going right now' was the answer. They drove into the war like that. My dad picked up a gun from the first dead enemy soldier he saw and this is what he used until you

guys flew to Lod with the first load of M16s. My dad passed away 15 years ago but never forgot that. Neither do we today, as your grandchildren bring us supplies in pretty much similar C5s to help us deal with Hamas, Hezbollah, Iranian and Houthi missile attacks. The NICKEL GRASS participants will always be in hour hearts.

0 Reply

Mike Sciales, Major, USAF (ret)
2 years ago

I was an A1C, assigned to the 1605th SP division (part of Ops). There were 50 of us. A C-5 lit up the early morning skies on 14 Oct 73. I was standing plane guard on two F-4Es bound for Iran under Foreign Military Sales. We parked it, roped it off since it was a Cat B, high value aircraft, and posted a guard. The second C-5 came in about 30 minutes later, with more a/c in the pattern, so we secured the flight line and entire perimeter. We did a recall and went into 16 hour shifts until three days later when TDY bodies were flown in. That first C-5 departed Lajes on 14 Oct, flying 186,200 pounds of cargo to Lod. By 6 Nov, they'd flown 567 missions, outstripped the Russians, proved the Air Bridge theory for ReForGer exercises, and probably prevented a nuclear war, since the IDF had suffered catastrophic losses in the first few days and PM Golda Meir was considering the nuclear options as presented by Gen Moshe Dyan. All in all, it was a good day for the world, and a moment when Lajes shined, before going back to being Brigadoon Air Base, Atlantic.

1 Reply

Thomas Pear
2 years ago

My father, Chuck Pear, was serving under General Jack Catton at Wright Patterson Air Force Base from 1972 – 1976. He was on Air Force Joint Logistics Command and a member of the Joint Logistics Chief of Staff. Would he have been involved in Operation Nickel Grass?

0 Reply

> **Mike Sciales, Major, USAF (ret)**
> Reply to Thomas Pear 2 years ago
>
> If he traveled with him, he would have come to Lajes. I met Gen Jack Catton when he came to Lajes and observed operations there. He wore a sky blue flight suit and surprised us in the guard break room. We all got up, he had some coffee with us, asked how we were doing, what we needed, and was gone off visiting other work sections. He impressed all of us, he was a good guy. I'm sure he kept your father busy.
>
> 0 Reply

Sam McGowan
2 years ago

I was on either the first or second C-5 to land at Lod. I was a loadmaster in the 3rd MAS, which had recently moved to Dover from Charleston. My wife was a WAF and we were living in base housing. I was alerted to depart on a deadhead crew with another crew that was coming in with a load of cargo from somewhere. That crew was commanded by Lt. Col. Josh Henson. (I think the last name is right. Josh had a reputation. He had joined the 3rd as a lieutenant copilot on C-124s and the 3rd was the only squadron he'd ever been in. My AC was Lt. Col. Ted

Griffith. We were to deadhead to Ljaes then take the airplane on to Lod while Col. Henson's crew went into crew rest. We were the first C-5 to arrive at Lod. When we got there, ACP informed us that clearance had yet to come in for the flight on to Lod and both crews were going into crew rest. My recollection is that our crew was the first in the stage with Henson's crew second. They put us in some old World War II barracks. The right hand didn't know what the left hand was doing. I found a letter a few years ago I wrote to my wife. In it I said it was the most screwed-up operation I'd ever been on – and I'd been on a lot. I looked out at the ramp and there were several C-5s parked there along with some C-141s and possibly some SAC C-135s.

Sometime that afternoon we were alerted. My recollection is that we the first crew to be alerted. We were given a Travis airplane rather than the Dover bird we had come in on. I think it was because the Travis bird came in later and parked in front of us. Col. Griffith got to the airplane and briefed us. He said we would be going into Lod and that the Arabs had warned that they were going to shoot us down. I asked where the parachutes were? There was an Air Force regulation that any airplane going into a hostile area MUST carry parachutes, but MAC had it's own regulations. He said there weren't any parachutes at Lajes and probably not at Dover either. i was really pissed. Here I was, a veteran of some 1,500 combat sorties including missions over North Vietnam and Laos and these idiots at Scott were going to send me to my death without a damn parachute! He said the Israelis promised to pick up up and escort us in.

After we took off, I went to bed in one of the bunkrooms. (I was primary loadmaster and was in the crew compartment along with everyone else – we didn't have any passengers.) We were around Gibraltor at that time. The pilots said the IAF F-4s were coming to meet us. They came up alongside us. It was after dark but we could see their navigation lights and rotating beacons. I felt that maybe I was going to live after all! We went on in to Lajes and landed without incident. We were met by a mob of people who were mostly milling around. Most seem to be civilian employees of El AL, the Israeli airline. I don't think the MAC ALCE team had got there yet. I've read Col. Don Strobaugh's report – we've been in touch for years, he contributed to my book on the C-130 TAC airlift mission – and I'm pretty sure he said the C-141 they were on aborted. Consequently, there was no K-loader and no MAC personnel. The Israelis were going to offload us by hand but then they came up with a cargo-handling vehicle used to load airline-type airplanes and we pushed the pallets onto them, or rather they did. An El Al van came up to the airplane after we finished offloading and "gave us" sandwiches and soft drinks. (We found out later that El Al billed the US for everything they "gave" us. I was surprised that the sandwiches were ham. The officers came back from the terminal where they had been lounging around while we offloaded the airplane and the engineers refueled. They had bouquets of roses they had been "given" and little tokens – key rings with a Star of David on them and some kind of message – for the enlisted men.

I don't remember much other than that. I knew we went back to Lajes but don't remember if we went back to Dover or not. I think we went back to Lajes. We finally got a mission going to Dover then on to Nellis with a load of classified cargo. It was a Russian-made radar van and a couple of other vehicles the Israelis had captured. We flew to Dover and crew-rested and I got to see my wife – she was on CQ at the WAF barracks but she paid a girl $20.00 to cover for her. We flew on to Nellis the next day and crew-rested,

I'm not sure how many times I went into Lod, at least three times. The first one was at night so I didn't see much. One was during the day and I was surprised to see cotton growing between the runways and taxiways. We got ham sandwiches, coffee and soft drinks on every trip – and the US was billed for it all.

I always thought we were the first crew to land at Lod but I was at the AMC Museum one time and saw the official 436th history of the mission and it gave credit to Josh Hinson. However, the description of the mission is IDENTICAL to ours – Travis airplane, no MAC support at Lajes, no K-loaders. Many years after i got out of the Air Force, i was living in NE Kentucky. I took a group of teenagers from our church to the Air Force Museum at Dayton. They were showing Air Force films in the auditorium. I was surprised to see that one was about NICKEL GRASS. I went in to watch it. One clip shows a 3rd crew commanded by Josh Hinson either loading or offloading

crew baggage at Lod or somewhere, maybe Dover.
NICKEL GRASS was an important mission, I suppose, and I am proud to have been a part of it but nearly as proud as I am of other missions i flew on the other side of the world.

2 Reply

Mike Sciales, Major, USAF (ret)

Reply to Sam McGowan 2 years ago

I was on the ground when you arrived. Your assessment is in line with mine. It WAS a cluster f**k of the highest order. None of us had an inkling of what was to come. We'd been brief the base was going to be shut down as redundant to needs. We'd been having a great time getting drunk and going to the running from the bulls in the streets of Lajes village.

0 Reply

Sam McGowan McGowan

Reply to Sam McGowan 1 year ago

Rereading this, I note a couple of errors where I said Lajes when I met Lod. I don't remember for sure if we went back to Dover after our first trip or back to Lod, but it seems to me we went back to Lod. I seem to remember we were gone at least a week and maybe two before we finally went to Dover, and even then we went on to Nellis because we had a load of classified cargo (a Soviet-made radar van and support vehicles.)

0 Reply

Bryan Glynn

Reply to Sam McGowan 2 months ago

My father was CMSGT Paul Glynn on the ALCE that started from McGuire went to Lajes and ended up at Lod offloading aircraft. I have his little blue cap Golda Meir gave them along with a kiss on the check. my father had an amazing career as a plane captain and tail gunner in dive bombers in the Korean war and later enlisted back in the air force at Charleston as a drop master/loadmaster and flight steward. He got selected to be on the presidential unit at national airport before they moved to Andrews. He became LBJ mil aide/valet and a flight steward on AF2. He was in Dallas with LBJ when President Kennedy was killed and transfer LBJ bags to AF1 and from that time on was the presidents mil aide /valet and flight steward on AF1 till LBJ left office. He was at Bergstrom for 2 years before heading to Viet Nam. He was at Danang and Tan son Nhut . He went from VN back to flying on AF1 for Nixon for a short period before heading to McGuire to be an aerial porter there. he retired in 75 and came back as civil service and worked mobility in the port and was the assistant TMO at McGuire in the port. He had an amazing career . He past in 2011, boy the stories he could tell with a little beer as lubricant. I lived in his shadow and retired as a colonel in the air force in 2009 as a mobile aerial port officer, rigger, C-130, C-5, C-17 , HC-130 , HH-60 and A-10 aircraft maintenance officer . Was the Moody 23rd MXG/CC and retired after my last assignment as the A-4 in the CAOC at Qatar. I am still serving my country as the chief of Logistics with the US State department Air Wing at Patrick doing embassy support and counter narcotics in central and south America. I am very proud of our families airlift heritage. I wrote some of the history of Dover for the AMC museum when I was stationed there in the 90s…

0 Reply

Daniel McNally

4 years ago

I am constantly saddened to discover that the Strategic Air Command's contribution to Operation Nickle Grass seems to be continually ignored since SAC was deactivated. I was the SAC Tanker Task Force command post for most of the operation. Notice I didn't say I worked there – I was the ONLY command post controller who got to Lajes at the initial deployment, so I was the command post. I slept under my desk during lulls in operations for almost two weeks. Then-Colonel Robert E. Chapman was the tanker task force commander. He was the 380th BMW decputy commander for operations. I traveled from Plattsburg AFB, NY to Lajes with him.

1 Reply

Charlie Tupper

Reply to Daniel McNally 3 years ago

I was at Lajes with the 135s from Pease. My OMS/CC, Lt Col Leroy Gibbons was in charge of maintenance operations. We got there a couple of days before MAC trash-haulers started to arrive. I agree, SAC Operations take a distant back seat, I guess technically we weren't even part of "Nickel Grass" since that was an airlift operation and AR was a SAC mission at that time.

1 Reply

Mike Sciales, Major, USAF (ret)

Reply to Daniel McNally 2 years ago

Don't be sad. I recall and appreciate the vital role those SAC birds played in achieving the success of operation Nickel Grass. I feel for you, however, there were some individuals in SAC who were a little too wrapped around the axle. One organic SAC security guy refused to guard a C-5 saying, "I only guard SAC birds." He got to stand near a KC-135, and somebody put a dead seagull in his sack lunch saying, "Guard this SAC bird." Might have been the reason people don't fondly recall the command that once owned over 50% of all USAF assets.

0 Reply

Rabbi Suzanne H Carter, D.Div.

4 years ago

I was months pregnant and living in Bat Yam during The Yom Kippur war – A week or more after the start of the war, I remember standing in Tel Aviv at the corner of Rehov Ben Yehuda/Frishman and heard a loud cargo plane overhead. I looked up and there was (what I now know) the C-5 the letters U S A F were on the wingspan (from underneath) – either headed to or coming from Lod. I broke down and wept, as an American/Israeli I felt much gratitude for the country of my birth. I will always remember that moment for the rest of my life. Our son was born at Assouta Hospital in Tel – Aviv, December 1973. Thank you for saving our lives. The memories have not diminished for 47 years SHALOM!

7 Reply

Chuck Wilkinson

5 years ago

According to internet searches I found 2 units awarded the USAF Outstanding Unit Awards. The 313th Military Air Lift Squadron in June 1974 and the 1605th Air Base Wing in January 1974 for Operation Nickel Grass.

1 Reply

Mike Sciales, Major, USAF (ret)

Reply to Chuck Wilkinson 2 years ago

I got mine, 1605th SPD, and also got a personal commendation “attaboy” from Kelton M Ferris, MG, 21st AF, just for doing my job. Always liked it.

0 Reply

SSGT Chuck Wilkinson

5 years ago

I was a security police desk Sgt during Operation Nickel Grass when the first planes landed. It was 12-hour shifts for the entire operation. My wife and I spent three years at Lajes. I often wondered why the thousands of men and women who took part in this operation never got real credit for what they did. I thought a ribbon or medal should have been issued.

2 Reply

Ralph E Bickley Sgt USAF 72-76

Reply to SSGT Chuck Wilkinson 4 years ago

I agree it should have been a medal or accommodation of some sort. You folks did a great job. I was working in the Command Post at 21st Air Force during this time. We were amazed the number of aircraft you folks were able to handle. We joked that if we tried to put more aircraft in there the island would certainly sink.

1 Reply

Charlie Tupper

Reply to Ralph E Bickley Sgt USAF 72-76 3 years ago

SAC tankers got there first. As the MAC acft started to arrive, we were pushed further and further up the ramp so the airlifters could park over the refuel pits Billeting was space, they put maybe six of us to a room too small for two.

1 Reply

Sam McGowan

Reply to Charlie Tupper 2 years ago

I don’t know that that’s true. I was on the first C-5 to land at Lajes. I don’t remember any C-135s there that night. They came in the next day.

0 Reply

Thomas Pear

Reply to SSGT Chuck Wilkinson 2 years ago

They should get credit, and we are coming up on the 50th anniversary of the operation.

0 Reply

Donnie Cooper
5 years ago

You think you were ignored during operation nickel grass. I was part of a 4 man USMC communication team providing support during the operation.

Our team pulled 24 hours support for about 2 weeks at Lajes AFB.

I heard that there was a medal issued to US forces later on (armed forces expeditionary medal).

I recently checked with the USMC awards dept and they don't have info on our involvement.

Oh well

3 Reply

> **Sam McGowan**
> Reply to Donnie Cooper 2 years ago
>
> If there was a medal issued, I never got it.
>
> 0 Reply

> **A1C Michael White**
> Reply to Donnie Cooper 1 year ago
>
> I was an A1C with the 3rd Mobile Comm Group out of Tinker AFB. We were woken at 3:00 am and told we would be providing comm support at Lod for the airlift. I think the 2nd Mob ended up going to Lod while we stopped at Lajes and supported their overworked team for about three weeks. Pretty sure our contribution has been completely forgotten.
>
> 0 Reply

John Dieltz
5 years ago

I was a C-5A Navigator newly assigned to the 9th MAS at Dover AFB when Operation Nickel Grass kicked off. Having just completed my training and initial check-out, my first operational mission was going to LOD in Tel Aviv. The navigation computer locked up just past the Straights of Gibraltar but the radar was still working. Used the radar to complete the zig-zag route through the Mediterranean to Tel Aviv. It was night time on the return leg to Lajes so we could use the stars to navigate to a successful return to the field and some much-needed crew rest after a 28 hour day.

3 Reply

> **Moshe**
> Reply to John Dieltz 1 year ago
>
> I was at offutt at air force global weather central, then under MAC. I was a software dev (computer programmer) working on the flight planning system. While AFGWC was tasked with providing weather data, using mainframe computer, it also processed incoming requests for flight plans from any MAC or SAC base. In 2 seconds it would create a flight plan, sending it back by teletype, complete with waypoints alternates,

required fuel, weather along the flight path…I was alerted, and called in about 4pm on that saturday (oct 6). spent several nights, and days, showing our operations unit (which helped MAC wings fine tune their flight plan requests) various tips and tricks for optimizing the flight plans generated by the computer.
Very exiting at that time. We also didn't get any mention, or commendation.

0 Reply

Harold Bolin
5 years ago

I was a crew chief at Dover during operation Nickel Grass. I flew to the Azores and on to Tel Aviv twice without a break. No crew rest for the us flying crew chiefs until we got back to Dover. We had to stay on the aircraft at Lojes and Tel Aviv to perform the necessary inspections and maintenance. We also did not receive any of those great meals or momento's that the rest of the crews got from the folks at Tel Aviv. Also never received any award, citation, or even a letter of appreciation for our efforts.

1 Reply

Sam McGowan
Reply to Harold Bolin 2 years ago

Interesting. I don't remember any crew chiefs on our airplane. I do remember some Dover maintenance personnel at Lod. One in particular was a Jewish staff sergeant named David. He was wearing civilian clothes and a skull cap but I knew him from Dover. By the way, those meals weren't "great." They were nothing but ham sandwiches like you get off of a roach coach. If you were there, you could have got them. They drove up beside the airplane and we got off the airplane and went over and they handed them to us.

0 Reply

Stephen Hagerman
6 years ago

I was a C5A loadmaster that participated in Operation Nickel Grass. 60th MAW, 75th MAS, Travis AFB. I made 3 trips from the East Coast to Azores and Lod Airport in Tel Aviv. The Four, F4 IAF fighter escort and the meals were great, but I and our crew never received any award, citation, or even a letter of appreciation for our efforts. Not from the Israeli Government. Not from the USAF. Not even from the US government. On our last trip we delivered 3 tanks picked up in Georgia. While there we picked up a mobile Russian SAM launcher. We then flew a clandestine mission into the UK spent the night and then flew it to Wright-Patterson so they could examine infrared sight they were using to shoot down our B52s in Nam. Why is there no award for this? You're welcome….

1 Reply

Peter Anderson
Reply to Stephen Hagerman 5 years ago

In 1973 I served in IDF during the war. The betrayal of Greece Spain and especially Germany is so hard to swallow. I would like to tell you personally that most of the Israelis even were not informed about all this, and about your heroic efforts. Thank you. And god bless. Without you israel would've not survived.

5 Reply

Savvas Vlassis

Reply to Peter Anderson 1 year ago

You are wrong. The Greek government publicly kept a neutral position but in reality he turned a blind eye and allowed full use of airfields and ports from the US SIXTH Fleet as well as US flights from Germany through ATHINAI FIR with Israel as destination.

1 Reply

Sam McGowan

Reply to Stephen Hagerman 2 years ago

The Israelis gave us some key chains, that's the only thing they gave us. If you got a "great meal," you must have gone inside the terminal to the MAC lounge. I never left the airplane. We got ham sandwiches. They weren't shooting any B-52s down in Vietnam then. The US pulled out of South Vietnam in March 1973, some six months BEFORE NICKEL GRASS.

0 Reply

LAWRENCE C GOULD

6 years ago

I was stationed with the 436th AMSq. at Dover AFB during Operation Nickel Grass Oct. 1973. The base was on tight security and some C-5s were roped off for extra security with a guard ready to shoot. We entered the aircraft for maintenance and noticed trucks painted U.N. white in the cargo bay. We saw lots of cargo painted white. So many were part of the airlift. We had support airmen at the Azores and had it went longer i would of rotated there for TDY. After it was all over each unit on base got a briefing and a job well done from our base commander.

2 Reply

Charles Tupper

9 years ago

I was a crew chief on the SAC response to Nickel Grass. Our KC-135As were at Lajes a day or two before MAC started showing up. We had about 10 tankers there and we were yo-yoing the F4s and A4s coming across the pond providing them fuel so they could get in closer to Ben Guiron.

2 Reply

Donald T. Cirba SGT Langley AFB, VA

Reply to Charles Tupper 1 year ago

I was an E4 Stationed at Langley AFB. I just got myself cleaned up for a night out in Hampton VA. When I proceeded to exit my barracks there was an MP blocking the exit and taking names of those who needed to return to our quarters and pack up our duffel bag and report immediately to a particular Hanger to process to be sent TDY, but not told why or where we were going. As I arrived at the hanger I could see the Langley's airstrip all lit up and numerous C-130s being worked on by crews removing the Decals/lettering, identifying markers, from the C-130s. As I arrived at the Hanger I also noticed USAF decals/lettering being removed from our AGE, Aerospace Ground Equipment. As I processed for this TDY, myself and others, we were told that this is a secret mission and when we are in the air we would be told what this mission was and where we were going. I remember calling my parents and explaining to them that something big was going on and they might not

hear from me for sometime. When we boarded our planes, I was given a manifest sheet with a listing of my related AGE equipment on it and to ensure everything was there on this plane. Once in the air and a few minutes over the Atlantic Ocean, an Officer called all of us for our attention and proceeded to tell us of this mission where Israel was at war and we would be transporting our planes and equipment to Lajes Airfield in the Azore Island, Portugal. When we landed, my eyes bulged out of my head as this huge airstrip was lighted up and thinking to myself how I never seen so many C-5s / C-141s on these airstrips in my life and how did they all fit on this airstrip. Once we exited our planes, buses were waiting for us to take us to temporary living quarters where we spent almost two weeks before we would be flown back to Langley AFB. I presumed that the C-130s and the equipment inside them would be transferred to the Israelis in support of the war effort. And yes to those who said our support never received an attaboy for our efforts in this mission, no ribbon and no medal, no mention that I know happened when we returned to our bases. Anyway, I was glad to be a part of this mission and glad that Israel won this war.

1 Reply

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